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Mammy's Chillin

AND

OTHER POEMS

Some bits of humor and truth
gathered at first hand from
among my people

By
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Harrisonburg, Va.

Price 40 Cents

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FOREWORD

The condition of illiteracy which was forced upon the Negro before his emancipation, and which yet prevails in many localities, is probably responsible for the reputation he enjoys of being the author of a peculiar wit and philosophy not possessed by other races. This same circumstance has also militated against the expression of that philosophy and wit in the linguistic excellence that characterizes the diction of more favored racial groups. This very fact, however, serves as a means of attracting attention to his many crude utterances of wit, wisdom, and humor, to the end that somebody is not only entertained but cheered and strengthened in journeying along life's rugged way. It is the desire to share in this good work by making available to the reading public some bits of this native humor and truth, gathered at first hand, which has prompted me to send forth these lines—together with the wish to pay a tribute of love to the memory of my sainted Father and Mother.

U. G. WILSON

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MAMMY'S CHILLUN

Some folks wants lots o' chillun
A-runnin' roun' about;
Dey says a home widout 'em
Is a mighty po' make-out.

But if dey had my young uns,
Dey'd sing a diff'unt song,
Dey'd say, "Good Lawd, delibbah,
An' let it be fo' long."

Ise got six pesky young uns,
Dat worries me ter deaf;
Dey don't give dere ole mammy
De time ter ketch her bref.

Dat one, he wants some 'lasses;
Dis one, he wants some bread;
One done upsot de baby
An' pitched him on his head.

Den one he gits to fightin'
Anur-r little brat;
De gal she starts ter bawlin'
Kase Joe done kill her cat.

At night it ain't no better;
It's "Come here, Mammy, please,
Kase Ben's got all de kiver,
An' I'se about ter freeze."

Sometimes dey yells aroun' me
From mornin' until night,
Unless I want some work done—
Den ain't a one in sight.

Now, all dem who wants chillun'
Jes' come and 'ply ter me;
I'll give 'em six an' pay 'em
Ter sot dere mammy free.

ANGIE CLEARS THE WAY

"Bill Jones, why don't yer be a man
An' speak out jes' fer once?
Yer keep a comin' ter my house
An' actin' like a dunce.

"Yer comes in here an' takes yer seat,
'Way back dar by de do',
An' when I 'gins ter inchin' up
You's ready fer ter go.

"Now, is yer skeered o' sump'n, Bill?
Come, tell yer Angeline:
What is it dat is 'plexin' you
An' restin' on yer min'?"

"Now, ain't yer thinkin' 'bout de joy
O' havin' of a wife
Ter cook yer eatin's, patch yer clo'es,
An' comfort yer through life—

"An' wants ter ask yo' Angeline
Ter be yo' lovin' bride,
An' ain't got nerve to 'spress yo'se'f
Fer fear o' bein' denied?

"Now, Bill, if dat's de trouble, pshaw!
Here's all I got ter say:
Jes' speak right out in meetin', kase
Dar's nuffin' in de way."

"O Angeline! O Angeline!
Ise happy as can be!
Yer sho did lif' a burden when
Yer spoke dem words ter me.

"Ise got de nerve ter ax yer now;
An' ax yer sho I will:
Can't yer give up yer loneliness
An' tie up ter yo' Bill?"

"Of cose! Lawd knows I loves yer, Bill!
Come, 'brace yo' honey tight!
Now—um—um—um—umph!
We'll tie de knot tonight."

UNCLE NED'S OBSERVATIONS

If yer see a toad a-jumpin'
Like he nnyvah jumped befo'
Or a roostah 'gins ter cackle
An' de hens dey 'gins ter erow,

If de summah nights git shorter
An' de day keeps gittin' long—
Now, dar ain't no use in talkin',
Kase dar's sump'n done gone wrong.

Dar's a snake somewhar a-crawlin'
'Bout dat lively jumpin' toad,
An' de ole hen's gone ter strikin',
An' de roostah's got de load.

Now de worl' am cuttin' capers
Dat am mos' loo hard fer me;
But dar's sump'n wrong when actions
Ain't jes' like dey use ter be.

If yer see a widdah woman
Primpin' up an' gettin' gay,
An' she got some kind of 'gagement
Wid de parson every day—

If some politishin feller
Comes an' grabs yer by de han'
Pats yer on de back an' tells you
Dat he is de people's man—

Dar is sump'n wrong, I tell yer,
An' dar aint no beltah sign;
Dat ar little primpin' widdah
Done got sump'n on her min'.

An' de politishin' feller,
He is in de same ole boat,
Kase he's runnin' for some office,
An' jes' wants ler git yer vote.

A SERMON BOILED DOWN

My sistahs an' my brudd'rin'
Assembled here ter day,
I'll talk a little Scripter,
An' den we'll sing an' pray.

I wants yer all to listen,
Bofe saint an' sinner man;
Kase what Ise now expressin'
Am hard to undahstan.

Be good to dem dat enss yer,
De beam take f'om yo' eyes,
An' when you` neighbor slaps yer,
Don't let yo' temper rise.

But turn right roun' an' tell him
De job ain't quite complete;
Den git some soap an' watta
An' wash his dirty feet.

Don't covet f'om yo' neighboh;
Don't try ter take his life;
His ox yer mus'n pester;
Don't think about his wife.

Don't worry 'bout yer eatin's
Or what yer's gwine to w'ar;
Do like de birds an' lilies—
Jes' loaf aroun' somewhar.

De flan' dat feeds de sparrer
Will give fer me an' you;
Jes' loaf aroun' and trus' Him,
Dat's all yer got ter do.

Now brudderin' an' sistahs,
De hour am gittin' late;
We'll stop right here a minnit
An' pass aroun' de plate.

I wants a good collection:
De parson mus' be fed;
He mus'n steal his chickens,
Nor beg his daily bread;

He's got to hab terbacker;
De madam mus' hab snuff;
An' nickels, dimes, an' pennies
Ain't gwine ter make enough.

So come along, my sistahs!
Some bruddah sing a shout!
Now make de quartahs jingle,
But keep de buttons out.

THE RIVER OF TIME

Time, thou deep and mystic river,
Ever rolling swiftly by,
Thou dost bear upon thy bosom
Universal destiny.

Men of every clime and nation
Sport upon thy sickly shore,
Spend one little hour, then, gathered
By thy waves, are seen no more.

Kingdoms ride upon thy breakers,
Empires mount thy surges high,
Great men swim awhile thy shallows,
Play their little part—and die.

Mighty, swiftly-rolling river,
Millions on thy banks now stand,
Soon to hear the solemn summons
To the unknown spirit land.

Though threescore and ten bleak winters
Stamp their impress on the brow,
Though the step, once firm and steady,
May be slow and feeble now;

Yet, abiding hills and valleys
Mock the brief sojourn of man;
And the oldest earthly pilgrim
Is but born, in God's great plan.

Seas once lashed in wrath by Xerxes,
Hills that felt great Caesar's tread,
Mountains scaled by proud Napoleon
Still remain; but they are dead.

Aged and hoary things terrestrial
But one lesson teach—sublime:
Mortal life is but a ripple
Dancing on the stream of time.

THE SEASONS

When nature wakes, and robes itself in
green,
And blossoms sweet with fragrance fill the
air,
And birds of sunny climes are heard and
seen,
Dispensing blithesome music ev'rywhere,
'Tis spring.

When higher climbs the sun, mid clearer
skies,
And fruit and flowers and fields of golden
grain
Bring beauteous scenes of landscape to our
eyes,
And man and beast seek shady haunts
again,
'Tis summer.

When verdant spring and summer's golden
hue
Have vanished with the passing of the year,
And cooler winds, no longer dank with dew,
Blow mournful strains across the wood-
land sere,
'Tis autumn.

When noon-day shades their dwarfy lengths
extend,
And chillier winds their blasts begin to
blow,
And life retires, a while in sleep to spend
Beneath the white-spread canopy of snow,
'Tis winter.

Thus hath this transient, changing human
life
Its spring-time, summer, fall, and wintry
blast:
Each feels the joys and pangs of earthly
strife;
Each mortal sleeps the sleep of death, at
last.

THE NOBLE

What if but a lowly cabin
Marks the spot where we were born?
What if shattered were the windows,
And the doorstep old and worn?
What though flowers of wealth and fashion
Ne'er did bloom for me or you?
We are noble, my dear brother,
If we nobly think and do.

Though mid scenes of classic splendor
Other eyes first saw the light;
Though by royal hands and tender
Some are shielded day and night—
Whether born in deepest thralldom
Or 'neath freedom's skies of blue,
We are only noble, brother,
If we nobly think and do.

They who could not keep the monster
Want outside their cottage door
Fought the battles of this nation,
Spilt their blood from shore to shore.
Oft they've humble hands extended
To the sick and dying, too:
These are noble deeds—each prompted
By a heart that's pure and true.

Cease thy boasts, O proud descendants
Of the favored of the earth;
Cease thy boasts of wealth and kindred;
Cease to frown on lowly birth.
'Tis not man's exalted station;
'Tis not wealth, nor race, nor hue:
We are only noble, brother,
When the heart is pure and true.

NEGRO SOLDIERS IN THE WORLD WAR

O'er all the world, for human rights,
The war-cloud doth descend,
And men are called from every land
That standard to defend.

From city, town, and country-side,
From mountain top to sea,
Rings out once more the battle cry,
"Make way for liberty!"

I see the lads of sable hue—
True patriots, one and all—
Come rushing to the listing place
In answer to the call.

I see them bid their friends goodby
When starting for the camp;
I see the sparkle in their eye;
I hear their steady tramp.

I see them board the transport ship
And give one longing glance;
I see them wave one last adieu,
Then sail away for France.

I see them on the battlefield,
A true and valiant band;
Their captain bids them face the foe—
They charge at his command.

Mid gas and smoke and bursting shell,
With banner lifted high,
They fight their way to victory,
While foemen quake and fly.

Their white comrades—the Fifty-sixth—
Have fallen into grief;
Through vales of death they double-quick
And rush to their relief.

Before the walls of Metz they stand,
Now many thousand strong;
I hear them sing in plaintive tones:
“Our stay here won’t be long.”

The tyrant sees impending doom
And mercy doth implore;
The terms of armistice are signed,
And now the war is o’er.

Thus hath the Negro played his part
To make the whole world free,
And give the boon of human rights
To men across the sea.

Forbid it, Lord, that e’er at home
These blessings be denied
To him, for which in other lands
He fought and bled and died.

SINCE MAMMY DIED

No watchin' at de windah now,
To see her boy come back;
No welcome waitin' in de do';
No nice and tasty snack;
Nobody tucks me in at night;
Nobody he'ps me do what's right—
Since Mammy died.

I miss de face dat use ter smile
As I come up de road,
De eyes dat noticed I was tired,
De han's dat eased my load;
I miss de home-fire burnin' bright—
In fac', de world it don't seem right
Since Mammy died.

AUNT CHLO' ON FRIENDSHIP

Did yer ebber see yo' shadder
On a bright an' sunny day,
How it sticks ter yer an' mimics
Eb'rything yer do an' say?

Did you ebber see its capers
When de clouds come in de sky,
How it 'gins to scamper f'om yer,
Fixin' fer ter say goodbye ?

Frien's is 'zackly like dem shadders,
Stickin' ter yer all de time
When yer's got some cash an' eatin's,
Plenty health an' in yo' prime;

But when hard luck obertakes yer,
Health done gone an' money too,
Den dey sneaks away an' leaves yer
Jis like sunshine shadders do.

Ise done come ter dis conclusion:
Lay yer frien's all on de shelf;
If 'tis cloudy or de sun shines,
Try ter peg it out yerself.

A PREDICAMENT

[These lines were written in 1904, suggested by the attitude of Congress and the Supreme Court toward several test cases of disfranchisement, and by a case of lynching in Ohio about the same time.]

I hab ofttimes heard repeated
Dese here words once dark ter me:
“We is jis betwix’ de debbil
An’ de deep blue sea.”

But I nebber knowed de meanin’
Ob dem til jis here ob late
When I heard dey’s lynchin’ black folks
In de great ol’ Buckeye State.

Now, it use ter be de custom
In de days ob long ago
Dat de black folks got protechum,
In de state ob O-hi-o.

But dey says things in Ohio
Ain’t no mo’ like use ter be;
So we’s jis betwix de debbil
An’ de deep blue sea.

When we take our suffrage troubles
To de Nation’s cote supreme.
Hopin’ fer ter git dat justice
Dat hab bin our daily dream.

We is tol’ by dat tribunal,
Wid politeness an’ good grace,
Dat dey has no jurisdieshum—
None what-ebber in de case.

Some folks says: “Go up ter Congress,
Whar dar’s backbone in de men;
If dar’s any justice fer yer,
You’ll be sho to git it den.”

When we takes ’em up ter Congress,
All dem statesmen ’gins to cry:
“Tis de cotes dat mus’ decide ’em;
We’s got udder fish ter fry.”

It’s a mighty hard way dealin’
Wid de black folks—clar’ it is;
But it proves de one conchushum
I hab come ter, dat is dis:

Dat de black man’s situashum
In dis proud lan’ of de free
Is jis somewhar twix’ de debbil
An’ de deep blue sea.

CALLING THE DARK-TOWN PARSON

The parson of the Dark-Town church
Took sick one day and died,
His people loved him for his gifts;
That could not be denied.

They said he'd hold the Bible up
And holler, "Come down, Love!"
Then shut his eyes and grit his teeth
And coo just like a dove.

To fill his place the deacons met;
They all were of one mind;
They thought a man like Parson Jones
Was mighty hard to find.

Now many would-bes came around;
The deacons tried them all,
To see which one would suit the best,
An who should get the call.

The first, a well-trained college man.
Essayed to win the prize;
He preached in highfalutin style;
They did not bat their eyes.

When he sat down, a deacon said;
"Dat man ain't gwine ter pass;
I'd jes' lief hear de cymbals soun',
Or tinklin' of some brass."

Another brother came around—
Somechow, by hook or crook—
He had no use for manuscript
And wouldn't touch a book.

He talked about two hours or more,
Then fell down on his knees.
The deacons shook their heads and said,
"Dese folks am hard to please."

Next Sunday morn the little church
Was crowded just the same,
To hear old brother Thunderbolt,
Of Timber-Valley fame.

The parson rose on schedule time;

He glanced his eyes around;
"Ise glad ter see so many out
Ter hear de Gospel soun".

"My interduction will be short;
De body I'll omit;
I'll jump right in de rousement part;
An' den Ise gwine ter quit.

"My frumpet ain't in frim today;
But if you he'p me out,
I'll do de very bes' I kin,
Ter give yer all a shout."

He raised his voice an octave higher,
Pulled off a moaning stunt;
The sisters all began to rock;
The men began to grunt.

He put his Bible on his head
And scampered all about;
That made the sisters shed their coats
In readiness to shout.

He stuck his fingers in his ears,
And then began to sing;
A deacon bellowed out, "Come on!
Dat's got de proper ring."

He double-quickened to front and back,
And rolled his eyes above,
Then said three times in thunder tones,
"COME DOWN, REDEEMIN' LOVE!"

The brothers jumped up in the air;
The sisters fell right out;
The parson raised the closing hymn,
"Now let God's chillun shout!"

The deacons shook the parson's hand;
The sisters fanned his brow;
And all agreed, "Dis Dark-Town Church
Sho's got some preacher now."



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